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1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

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Table of Contents

1	Introductory remarks	000
2	A brief history of criminology at the UN	000
2.1	Intergovernmental process	000
2.2	The Secretariat	000
2.3	Criminological research agenda's of the UN	000
2.4	The United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems	000
2.5	The International Crime Victims Survey	000
3	A sample of international crime statistics	000
3.1	Levels of volume crime	000
3.2	Homicide rates	000
4	Prospects of criminological research at the UN	000
5	In conclusion	000

1 Introductory remarks

In this chapter we will first give a brief historical overview of criminological research conducted in the framework of the United Nations. In a second part, we will highlight some of the comparative crime and justice statistics that were recently collected and published by the United Nations. Finally, we will discuss the challenges and prospects of comparative criminological research at the United Nations.

2 A brief history of criminology at the UN

Criminological research of the United Nations must be understood within the context of its crime prevention and criminal justice programme. This programme in its turn must be understood within the wider institutional and political context of the United Nations. Our overview of criminology at the UN is therefore preceded by a brief account of political trends and institutional arrangements impinging on the UN crime programme and its research component.

1 Internationale Probleme

2.1 Intergovernmental process

Generalized statements are often made about “the United Nations” as if it were a single organization with a clear and stable structure, similar to a nation state or multinational company. In reality the UN can better be seen as a network of entities that compete with each other for funds and power in the political and bureaucratic playing field defined by the UN's Charter. Each little part of the UN has its own unique history, its own, ever-changing constituency and its own professional culture.

A distinction must first be made between the United Nations as an inter-governmental body (diplomats reaching consensus decisions) and the United Nations as an international organization (UN staff carrying out operational tasks). We will first focus our attention on the intergovernmental process. The intergovernmental bodies possess legislative powers and provide governance, including budget oversight and substantive guidance, to all activities of the UN. The highest political body is, of course, the General Assembly. Other more specialized political bodies are the Security Council and the Council for Social and Economic Affairs (ECOSOC).

Since 9/11 the Security Council is heavily involved in the fight against terrorism, including its links with organized crime. Occasionally an interest has also been expressed in the security implications of markets in illegal drugs, eg in Afghanistan or Colombia. Traditionally crime issues are not considered from a security perspective and therefore rarely taken up by the Security Council.

The General Assembly deposes its work to six Committees, comparable to Parliamentary Commissions in Europe, eg Committees for Health, Agriculture or Home Affairs. Within the structure of the GA, there is no specialised committee on Justice Affairs. At the UN crime and drugs issues are dealt with by the Third Committee, the Committee for Social Humanitarian and Cultural Matters. Very few of the diplomats representing their countries in this Committee have any substantive knowledge of crime or criminal justice issues. In practice, the subject is seen as fair game for junior diplomats with a generalist outlook. Surprisingly, the Third Committee is not supposed to look at the budgetary aspects of the crime programme. Decisions on funding matters are the prerogative of the prestigious Fifth Committee.

To complicate matters further, governance over the UN crime programme is mainly exerted by another UN body, the Social and Economic Council. This Council was set up to prevent wars through development but has since been overshadowed by the World Bank and the IMF. One of ECOSOC's dozen ‘functional commissions’ is the Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ). Another is the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Both commissions meet annually in Vienna for a week or more. Since 1991 the Crime Commission consists of representatives of forty governments elected by the ECOSOC. In principle this Commission supervises the crime programme, although it has, once again, no say over its financial resources. Before 1991 the Commission dealing with crime issues was mainly technically focussed. Delegations of countries consisted of experts elected by ECOSOC in their individual capacity. It was called the Committee on Crime Prevention and Control. Since then the debate in the new commission has gradually become more political and heads of delegations tend to be diplomats rather than experts from ministries of justice.

Traditionally, substantive guidance to the UN crime programme is also given by the quinquennial UN Congresses on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, formerly called Congresses on Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders. These World Congresses, organized every five years since 1955, used to adopt resolutions on minimum standards and model treaties in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice that were subsequently endorsed by the ECOSOC or the GA, bypassing the Crime Commission, formerly Crime Committee. At the Congress in Cuba in 1990 several new standards and

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

norms were adopted. In the aftermath of this Congress, Member States decided to put the Congresses fully under control of the intergovernmental process. Since 1991 Congresses report to the Crime Commission rather than to ECOSOC directly. The Congresses have lost their status as a quasi-legislative body.

The origins of the Committee go back to an international scholarly organization, the International Penal and Penitentiary Foundation. This foundation transferred most of its functions to the UN in the late 1940s. This historical background explains the professional nature of the original committee. It also explains why the UN Crime Programme in its early years bore the stamp of the New Movement for Social Defense and idealistically promoted scientifically based treatment of offenders. Not coincidentally the Congresses were up to 2005 called Congresses on Crime Prevention *and the Treatment of Offenders* (italics added).

In line with the philosophy of social defense the first Congress in 1955 adopted the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Offenders. The 1975 Congress produced the Declaration against Torture. In 1985 the Congress adopted the Declaration on the Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power. The 1990 Congress in Cuba produced, as said, an extensive list of new guidelines and model laws on various topics. In 2002 the Crime Commission adopted the Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime. The totality of all guidelines in this area are known as the UN's Standards and Norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. They do not constitute legally binding obligations for Member States and are generally regarded as representing soft law (Clarke, 2005).

As mentioned, important changes in the governance structure of the UN crime programme were introduced in 1991. Based on deliberations at a special summit in Versailles in 1991 the General Assembly adopted a resolution on **"Creation of an effective United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme"**. The crime programme was brought fully under the control of the intergovernmental process. In order to promote more operational activities a special Fund was established for the programme to allow Member States to make earmarked voluntary contributions. One the one hand, the changes reflected the growing political importance of crime issues in the era of globalisation. They raised the expectation that the programme would be enabled to significantly expand its legislative, operational and analytical activities. On the other hand the changes marked the end of a venerable tradition of scholarly debates about crime and justice at the highest international level. The upgrading of the crime programme politically and institutionally has come at the price of reduced independence.

Around 1995 member states of the UN developed a growing interest in the elaboration of a UN Treaty against Transnational Organized Crime. The Crime Commission initiated negotiations on such Treaty which in record time resulted in the adoption by the GA on 15 November 2000 of a fully fledged UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and three supplementary protocols (dealing with trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants and production and trafficking of illicit firearms respectively). Four years later the GA also adopted the UN Convention against Corruption.

Both UN Crime Conventions contain special articles obliging State Parties to collect and exchange scientific information on the types of criminality at issue as well as on measures of prevention and control. Article 28 of the UNTOC for example obliges State Parties "to consider developing and sharing analytical expertise concerning organized criminal activities with each other and through international and regional organizations. For that purpose, common definitions, standards and methodologies should be developed and applied as appropriate". From a legal perspective the entry into force of these international legal instruments means that the UN crime programme has come of age. The crime programme is now firmly based on a set of focussed instruments of hard international law.

1 Internationale Probleme

Both Conventions foresee the establishment of Conferences of State Parties to overlook implementation of Treaty provisions and to suggest possible revisions required. These Conferences operate independently of the existing Crime Commission and add yet another new element to the heavy governance of the crime programme. The Conventions also foresee the establishments of special funds for technical cooperation, including information exchange on transnational crime and corruption.

2.2 The Secretariat

In order to counterbalance the inertia of consensus-build intergovernmental decision-making, the Charter of the United Nations has vested special powers in the UN Secretariat. Its head, the Secretary General, is elected by the GA for a term of five years. The UN Secretariat is funded from regular contributions from all member states according to a pro rata assessment based on national wealth.

In the course of the years fifty or more specialized agencies and programmes have been set up outside the core UN secretariat which together make up the "UN system". Examples are UNDP, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNAID and Habitat. Each of these organizations has entered into a special agreement with the UN and is funded independently from the regular budget. In Vienna the United Nations Drugs Control Programme was established in the late 80s to carry put operational functions mandated by the international drugs conventions.

In the absence of an UN Treaty on crime issues, other than the treaties on drugs control, there was till 2000 no legal mandate for a fully-fledged crime prevention programme. This explains why it was never decided to set up a specialized agency dealing with crime issues as was done for drugs control in the 1980ties. Funds of the UN's crime prevention programme continued to be derived from the regular budget of the UN Secretariat governed by the Fifth Committee in New York. Staff working on crime issues was initially concentrated in a small entity within the Division for Social Development in New York, called the Social Defense Section, later called the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch. It consisted of no more than a handful of staff members.

In 1980 the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch was transferred to Vienna, the third capital of the UN, where it was positioned next to the much bigger United Nations International Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP). Substantive guidance was, as said, initially in the hands of a committee of international experts rather than of government representatives. The focus of the Branch was the facilitation of drafting of international standards and norms by committed international legal scholars. Its mainly technical orientation and its lack of an operational component explains its comparatively strong focus on criminological work. Over the years the Branch managed to preserve some elements of the programme's academic heritage and maintained excellent contacts with representatives of the academic community. Several of its chiefs and senior staff members, such as the late Prof *Gerhard Mueller* and his wife *Freda Adler* of Rutgers University in the USA in the 1970 ties, were distinguished criminological scholars in their own right. Over the years the Branch entered into special cooperation agreements with several regional and national research and training institutes, including the United Nations Inter-regional Crime and Justice Research Institute in Turin, Italy (UNICRI), ILANUD in Costa Rica, UNAFEI in Japan, UNAFRI in Africa, The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control in Helsinki (HEUNI) and the Vancouver Centre for Criminal Law Reform. At a later stage agreements were also made with a series of national research institutes including the National Institute of Justice of the USA.

At the summit in 1990 proposals were adopted to streamline the cooperation between secretariat and these institutes. They were brought under the umbrella of the Programme Network of Institutes (PNI). In theory the PNI was supposed to receive substantive guid-

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

ance from the Crime Commission together with the Branch. In practice this has never materialized. The Institutes are funded independently from the UN and governance is in the hands of national donors. This set up has prevented effective coordination. The institutes are also loosely affiliated in the International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council of the program which convenes annually in Courmayeur, Italy and organizes research conferences back to back to its meetings.

Special mention must be made of the establishment in 1968 of the United Nations Social Defense Research Institute in Italy. This initiative confirms the political strength of the social defense movement in those years. The mandate for this criminological research institute was renewed by ECOSOC in 1989. Its name was changed into United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI). The 1989 statute of UNICRI introduced an Executive Board whose members are elected by ECOSOC in their capacity as individual experts. The director of the Institute is appointed by the Secretary-General and is answerable to the Board which also approves the Institute's annual workplans. Through these arrangements the Institute's freedom from political interference is assured. Funding of UNICRI takes place through a special account within the UN Crime Fund established in 1991.

As part of the comprehensive reforms implemented by former Secretary General Kofi Annan, the Crime Branch and UNDCP were merged into the United Nations Office on Drugs Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP) in 1998. For four years the Crime Branch operated as component of this Office under the name of Centre for International Crime Prevention (UNCICP). During those years the voluntary funding of the activities of the crime programme through the Crime Fund expanded and global programmes against Organized Crime, Trafficking in Human beings and Corruption were launched. Each of these operational programmes included research components that were executed in collaboration with UNICRI.

In 2002 the decision was taken to fully integrate the administration of the drugs and crime programmes into the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). An important consideration behind this merger was the wish to better involve the UNDCP network of field offices in the implementation of the newly launched operational crime projects. Research functions of the previous UNCICP were integrated into the small research section of former UNDCP, responsible for the bi-annual World Drugs Report. Other UNCICP staff with substantive criminological knowledge were integrated into the Human Security Branch of the Operations Division, responsible for substantive back-stopping of field projects of the Office, including those concerning crime and criminal justice issues. The Servicing of both the Crime Commission and the Conferences of State parties of the two UN Crime Conventions was assigned to the Division of Treaty Affairs. Work on the highly topical issue of terrorism prevention was also placed in this Division since it mainly provides legal advisory services concerning the existing international counter terrorism conventions.

2.3 Criminological research agenda's of the UN

Now that we have sketched the evolving politico-institutional context of the UN's work on crime and criminal justice we will 'zoom in' on the contents and prospects of its criminological research agenda.

As said, a first UN Congress on crime issues was convened in 1955. The first quinquennial congresses set the scene for important international debates on major trends in penal reform. American scholars presented the results of new penological research. The special interest in penal and penitentiary issues is also reflected in the first work programmes of UNSDRI/UNICRI. In later years other topics besides prison reform

1 Internationale Probleme

became more prominent. Since 1970 UNICRI produced a steady stream of reports on its research projects, usually written by consultants, as well as proceedings of international research conferences. Topics of these reports and conferences included prison architecture, migration and crime, economic crises and crime, juvenile justice and drugs-related crime problems. Interesting to note is the truly international orientation of the publication programme in the early years. Authors were selected from all world regions and reports were written in French and Spanish besides English.

For all UN Crime Congresses working papers were prepared which provided overviews of existing academic literature on the topics under consideration. These working papers were prepared by staff of the Secretariat, with the assistance of ad hoc experts recruited from the academic community. Highlights of some of the older reports can be found in a recent monograph on victim-related issues (*Vetere, David, 2006*). There can be no doubt that working papers for the Congresses were more research-based than is usual in other parts of the UN. A typical example of such report was a paper devoted to the Organization of Research for Policy Development in Social Defense (A/Conf.43/4). On many of the Congresses special workshops were organized on the role of research in policy development and evaluation.

During the existence of UNCICP analytical work formed an integral part of operational projects on transnational crime issues. In the few years of its existence CICIP staff worked on the collection of information on organized crime groups (*Van Dijk, Shaw, Buscaglia, 2002*). In collaboration with UNICRI, assessments were made of corruption and human trafficking problems in several developing and transitional countries. Global databases were set up on incidents of terrorism (*Alex Schmid*) and human trafficking respectively (*Kangaspunta, 2002*). In 1999 UNCICP also launched its own academic Journal, FORUM on Crime and Society edited by *Jan van Dijk* and *Vincenzo Ruggiero* (professor of criminology at Middlesex University), published in the six UN languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Chinese).

Although the Social Defense movement and the human rights movement provided broad philosophical guidance to the Secretariats papers, it is difficult to discern a distinct criminological research tradition with its own methodological or theoretical features in the UN crime programme. The reports produced by the Crime Branch and later by UNICRI and UNCICP can best be characterized as eclectic. They by and large reflected the prevailing criminological agendas of the day. A constant feature in the UN's criminological research agenda, however, seems the search for comparable international indicators of crime and justice. In my view this comparative statistical work constitutes, in spite of its many methodological problems, the most important contribution of the UN crime programme to international criminology.

2.4 The United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

One of the first tasks assigned to the small crime unit within the UN Secretariat was the collection of statistics on crime. As early as April 1948 the Social Commission, forerunner of the Economic and Social Council, requested the secretariat to undertake a study of the impact of the Second World War on levels of crime. A ques-

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

tionnaire requesting official statistics on crimes recorded by the police and convictions for the period from 1937 to 1946 was sent to the Member States (UNCJIN Crime and Justice Letter, 1997). The lack of comparability of the fragmented data submitted precluded specific conclusions other than that in most countries recorded crime had been on the increase, especially in the countries that had taken part in the war.

After a failed first attempt in 1974, the Secretariat sent out a detailed questionnaire on comparable cross-national crime and criminal justice statistics in 1976/1977. This study is regarded as the first UN Crime Survey. In response to a working paper of the secretariat containing some results, the Sixth UN Crime Congress of 1980 requested further work on the survey. During two Expert Group Meetings, hosted by Rutgers University and Sam Houston University in the USA, a new questionnaire was designed with an enlarged focus on the operations of the criminal justice system. The resulting revised questionnaire was distributed in 1983 and this sweep is regarded as the second UN Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (crime surveys for short).

The Secretariat duly reported on key results of the second and third surveys in working papers for the Congresses in 1985 (Milan) and 1990 (Cuba). To prevent criticisms from individual countries data were typically published at the regional level only.

In 1990 the ECOSOC recommended streamlining of the questionnaire and execution at shorter intervals than five years. The reformed Crime Commission which replaced the old Committee, adopted several resolutions requesting further work of the Secretariat on the surveys along these lines. The questionnaire was indeed somewhat curtailed but at the same time extended with new questions on transnational crime. Reports on the fourth survey were submitted to the 1995 Congress in Cairo. Data on Europe and North America were presented in more detail- and after additional quality checks – by HEUNI in 1995 (*Kangaspunta* 1995).

Work on the fifth crime survey was much delayed. The expectation that the new crime prevention programme adopted at the Versailles summit of 1990 would result in more generous funding from key member states, including for analytical work, had not materialized. The Crime Branch although endowed with a broader mandate, continued to be handicapped by a chronic lack of resources. New results of the surveys were not published before 1999. They were included in the Global Report on Crime and Justice, produced by Oxford University Press for UNCICP (*Newman* 1999).

In the meantime the questionnaire had been further curtailed at Expert Group Meetings in Buenos Aires (1997) and in Veldhoven, The Netherlands (1998). At those meetings, it was concluded that the collection of data on organized crime required new methodologies that were not feasible in the framework of the UN crime survey. In 1999 the sixth survey went into the field with a questionnaire that had been reduced by half. Since then the surveys have been executed in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Response rates in the latter surveys have fluctuated around 70–80 countries, mainly from the Western group.

1 Internationale Probleme

Since 2000 results of the survey are made available electronically on the website of UNCICP (later UNODC). This has greatly improved their accessibility. The results of the crime surveys belong to the most frequently visited parts of this website. Results were also published in reports to the 2000 Crime Congress in Vienna and subsequently in the newly established journal FORUM on Crime and Society (*Shaw, Van Dijk, Rhomberg* 2003).

2.5 The International Crime Victims Survey

One of the most important and most frequently cited shortcomings of the UN Crime Survey is that figures of crimes recorded by the police cannot be reliably used as a measure of the level of crime, especially not for comparative purposes across countries. Rates of crimes recorded in police administrations are determined by domestic criminal legislation, public reporting of crimes and the capacity and willingness of the police to make official records of such reports. As a general rule, rates of crimes recorded per 100.000 inhabitants tend to be the highest in the most affluent countries, eg New Zealand, Sweden and Denmark and the lowest in developing or transitional countries. These rankings do not reflect the distribution of the volume of crime as experienced by the public. Rates of police-recorded crimes should be seen as indicators of the effectiveness of law enforcement rather than of levels of crime.

Since 1990 the Crime Branch, later UNCICP, has urged for due caution when using rates of recorded crimes as a measure of crime. Publications on comparative crime rates often focussed on rates of homicides since these are generally seen as less affected by varying reporting and recording patterns (*Rubin, Walker* 2004). For similar reasons INTERPOL decided in 2004 to discontinue its well-known series of international statistics of police-recorded crimes. Rates of recorded crimes had lost their credibility for comparative purposes.

Over the past three decades more and more countries have started to conduct sample surveys among the general population on experiences with crime as an alternative source of information about crime to what the police themselves record. Such victimization surveys provide important additional information on crime as experienced by the public, rates of reporting crimes to the police, experiences of victims with the police, fear of crime and the use of crime prevention measures. If the research methodology used is standardised, the surveys also offer a new opportunity for the collection of crime statistics, which can be used for comparative purposes (*Alvazzi del Frate, Zvekic, Van Dijk* 1993).

In 1987 the initiative was taken by a working group of European criminologists chaired by the author to launch a fully standardized survey, called the International Crime Victims Survey. In 1988 the first ICVS was carried out in thirteen countries, mainly from Western Europe and North America (*Van Dijk, Mayhew, Killias* 1990). At the UN Crime Congress in Cuba in 1990, staff members of UNICRI proposed expansion of the survey to developing countries through a series of pilot studies in capital cities across the world. In collaboration with UNICRI, the ICVS was conducted in capital cities of ten or more developing countries in 1992 (*Svekics, Alvazzi del Frate* 1995) The subsequent sweeps of 1996 and 2000 were executed in a selection

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

of countries from all world regions (*Alvazzi del Frate* 1998; *Alvazzi del Frate, Hatalak, Svekics* 2000). Execution in developing countries was promoted by UNICRI through a system of grants and the provision of technical assistance. Most of this pioneering work was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Development Aid.

The fifth survey was carried out in 2004/2005 in over thirty countries, including most Western countries as well as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Mozambique, Japan, Cambodia and Hong Kong. Surveys in 18 European countries were co-funded by the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission (under the acronym EU/ICS). Reports on the EU and global results have been published (*Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, Manchin and Hedig* 2007; *Van Dijk, van Kesteren & Smit* 2008).

Since 1989 surveys have been carried out once or more in around 30 industrialized countries and in 50 cities in developing countries and countries in transition. A report on all key findings available has been published jointly by INTERVICT, The Dutch Ministry of Justice and UNODC (*Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, Smit* 2008). Over 300,000 citizens have to date been interviewed in the course of the ICVS. This process has resulted in a body of victim survey data across a variety of countries, unmatched by any other criminological data set (*Kury* 2001). All historical data sets of the ICVS can be consulted at the websites of INTERVICT and of Gallup/Europe.

The results of the ICVS have been published in several monographs. Key results were also included in the UN's Global Report on Crime and Criminal Justice of 2000 (*Newman* 1999). In the secondary analyses of European and North American data carried out by HEUNI composite indices were used which combine police data with results of the ICVS (*Kangaspunta, Joutsen, Olus* 1998; *Van Dijk and Kangaspunta* 1999; *Aromaa et al* 2003).

In April 2005 UNODC and UNICRI presented a joint working paper for the UN Crime Congress in Bangkok on Trends in Crime and Justice. This report, subtitled Work in Progress, combined results of the UN Crime Survey with those of the ICVS. In addition new data were presented on non-conventional types of crime such as corruption and organized crime drawn from surveys among business executives about perceived risks for their companies. The report was subsequently also distributed among attendants of the 14th Crime Commission in Vienna. An extended and revised version of some of its chapters was later published *Van Dijk* (2007). The next paragraph will highlight some of the key results.

3 A sample of international crime statistics

3.1 Levels of volume crime

The ICVS interviews samples of households about their recent experiences with the most frequently occurring types of conventional crime (volume crime). National samples include at least 2,000 respondents who are generally interviewed with the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) technique. In the countries where this method is not applicable because of insufficient distribution of telephones, face-

1 Internationale Probleme

to-face interviews are conducted in the main cities, generally with samples of 1,000–1,500 respondents.

The ICVS provides an overall measure of victimisation in the previous year by any of the ten “conventional” crimes included in the questionnaire. Among the eleven “conventional” crimes, some are “household crimes”, i.e. those which can be seen as affecting the household at large, and respondents report on all incidents known to them. A first group of crimes deals with the vehicles owned by the respondent or his/her household. A second group refers to break and enter (burglaries) and a third group of crimes refers to victimization experienced by the respondent personally, including robbery, pickpocketing, assault and sexual offences.

The results of the ICVS 1996–2005 show that on average one in four citizens (25 %) living in urban areas suffered at least one form of victimization over the twelve months preceding the interview. This result confirms that real levels of crime are several times larger than those recorded by the police because of non-reporting by victims or non-recording by the police. In selected Western countries analyses have shown real crime to be four to five times larger than police-recorded crime, especially violent and sexual crime. The gap between actual and recorded crime is much larger in developing countries since reporting and recording rates are considerably lower as discussed in the previous chapter. Globally, the number of real volume crimes committed can be roughly estimated as at least ten times higher than those recorded. Global recorded crime can rightly be described as just the tip of the iceberg.

Regional rates do not differ more than ten percentage points from the global average. Victimization rates are highest for city dwellers in Latin America (34 %) and Africa (33 %) and lowest in Asia (21 %). Variation in over all victimization among regions mainly consisting of developed countries is minimal.

It is noteworthy that the variation in regional rates does not fully conform to the commonly held notion that levels of crime are driven by poverty. The low crime rate of Asia is clearly at odds with this notion. The rate of the Eastern European countries below that of Central and Western Europe also belies easy generalizations about the relationships between poverty and crime.

Figure 1 shows regional distribution of one year victimisation rates for ten crimes as observed in the ICVS. The ICVS defines burglary as house-breaking for purposes of theft. Robbery is defined as theft from the person by use of force, thus involving direct contact between victim and offender (“contact” crime). Rates for all types of crimes refer to percentages of persons victimized at least once by any of ten crimes in the course of last year.

The differences among the regions were larger for the two crimes involving property, which were by far the highest in Africa and Latin America. Burglary in Africa was four times more frequent than in Western Europe. Robbery in Latin America was eight times higher than in Western Europe, North America and Australia. Contrary to a common perception, rates of burglary as well as of robbery and assault/threats are not higher in the USA than in most parts of Western Europe. In fact USA rates are significantly lower than those of, for example, England and Wales and The

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

Netherlands. The data in respect of robbery confirm the validity of the concern about urban violence in several main cities in Latin America and Africa, including in some of the newly established democracies such as South Africa (*Shaw, Van Dijk, Rhomborg* 2003).

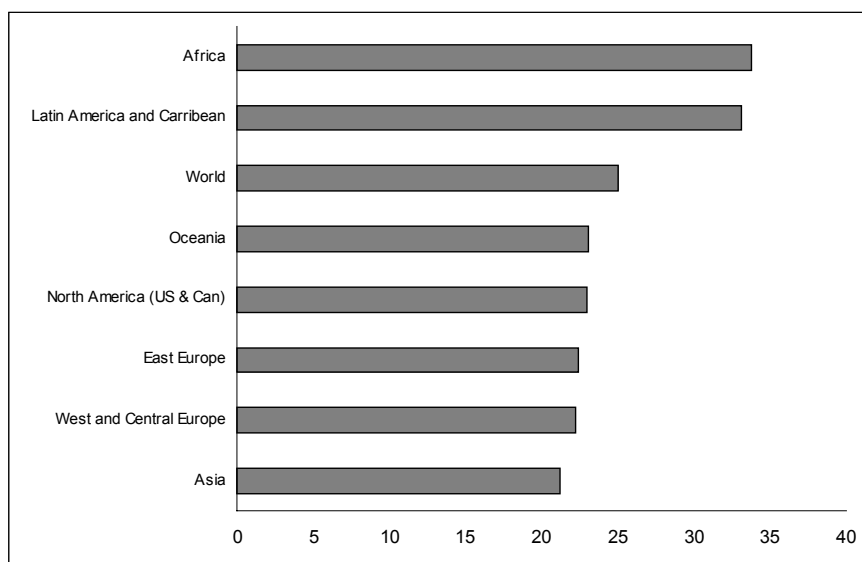


Figure 1: Overall percentages of general public in urban areas victimized by any of ten types of common crime during the past twelve months, by world regions (ICVS 1996–2005)

The crime category of assault and threat is defined in the ICVS as personal attacks or threats, either by a stranger or a relative or friend, without the purpose of stealing. It is another “contact” crime and although physical consequences may be minor in most cases, it may well have important emotional repercussions for victims. Assault on women are more likely to be domestic in nature than assault on men. In a third of the cases of violence against women, the offender was known at least by name to the victim. In one of five of the cases the crime was committed in the victim’s own house. The level of violence against women is inversely related to the position of women in society, with developing countries showing much higher rates (*Alvazzi del Frate, Patrignani* 1995).

Table 1 shows the ranking of countries on the basis of one-year overall victimization rates, based on results of ICVS surveys carried out in the period 1996–2005. For a few countries which did not participate in these three rounds of the ICVS, rates from the 1992 survey were added (their country names are printed in *italics*)¹.

¹ In interpreting country rates, it must be borne in mind that they are based on relatively small samples with an average size of 1,000 respondents. The actual rates among the population may deviate from the ones given here. As a general rule there is a less than 10 % chance that

1 Internationale Probleme

Table 1: World ranking of countries according to victimization of public by any crime in the course of one year rank number and percentage victims per year (source: ICVS 1996–2005 mainly)

Fifteen countries with highest rates			Fifteen countries with medium high rates			Fifteen countries with the lowest rates		
rank	country	percent-age	rank	country	percent-age	rank	country	percent-age
1	Colombia	48,7	16	United Kingdom	32,0	58	Turkey	17,9
2	Zimbabwe	46,8	19	Argentina	31,2	59	France	17,8
3	Costa Rica	43,5	21	India	29,7	60	Austria	17,2
4	Swaziland	43,4	26	Lesotho	27,3	61	Korea, Rep.	16,7
5	Cambodia	41,3	28	Netherlands	27,0	62	Italy	16,6
6	Peru	41,0	30	Iceland	26,4	63	Spain	13,7
7	Mongolia	40,6	31	New Zealand	25,9	64	Australia	13,7
8	Bolivia	38,9	34	South Africa	25,7	65	Greece	13,5
9	Mozambique	37,7	37	United States	23,3	66	Croatia	12,9
10	Tanzania	37,6	38	Russian Federation	23,1	67	Hungary	12,6
11	Tunisia	35,9	39	Denmark	22,9	68	Japan	10,8
12	Namibia	35,1	46	China	21,6	69	Portugal	9,7
13	Paraguay	34,5	51	Switzerland	20,1	70	Philippines	9,1
14	Zambia	34,4	53	Canada	19,1	71	Hong Kong, China	7,8
15	Slovak Republic	32,4	56	Brazil	18,4	72	Azerbaijan	7,7

The countries with the highest prevalence rates for conventional crime are mainly from Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Mongolia, Cambodia and Estonia. A high prevalence rate was also found in Papua New Guinea (not included).

Countries of Europe and North America are almost without exception situated in the middle category. Contrary to common perception, overall rates of volume crime – such as burglary, robbery and assault/threats – are not higher in the USA than in most parts of Western Europe. In fact USA rates are significantly lower than those of, for example, England and Wales and France. The overall rate of Canada is somewhat below the mean of the European Union and that of the United States of America.

Countries with the lowest rates form a fairly mixed group with a strong representation of Eastern European and of both affluent Asian countries (Japan, South Korea), middle-income ones (China) and poor ones (Philippines, Indonesia). Switzerland, although less so than in the first round of the ICVS, is still qualified as one of the countries with the safest cities in Western Europe.

the overall victimization rates of the population deviate more than three percent points from the rates of the samples. Individual country rates, then, cannot be seen as exactly right. They provide a reliable indicator of which countries have relatively high, moderately high, or relatively low rates of victimization.

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

The results of the ICVS 2005 allow a comparison of the 2004/2005 rates with rates recorded in previous rounds of the ICVS for some developed countries (EU countries, Australia, Canada and the USA). Available trend data point to a continued downward trend in victimization by common crime across these developed countries since 2000. The mean victimization rates of participating EU countries, for example, went from 16.9 in 1988 to 21.6 in 1992 and to 21.4 in 1996. It fell slightly to 20.1 in 2000, and steeply decreased to 14.8 in 2004 (*Van Dijk, Manchin, Van Kesteren, Hedig* 2007).

3.2 Homicide rates

For obvious reasons, data on completed homicide are not available through victim surveys. Fortunately homicide represents one of the few types of crime for which data from police and health administrations are available which can be used for tentative comparisons at the international level. This is due to a relatively uniform definition and to relatively high reporting and recording rates across all countries (*Zimring, Hawkins* 1997).

Statistics on police-recorded homicides are recorded through the United Nations Crime Surveys, the latest covering 2000 up to 2002. The other main source of information are the health statistics collected by the World Health Organization through hospital surveys (WHO, 2002). The WHO statistics reflect the views of medical doctors on the causes of death of hospitalized patients and are independent from police administrations. Comparisons of the country rates according to the UN Surveys and the WHO revealed a reasonable degree of agreement (*Rubin, Walker* 2004). However, an analysis of rates over a 16-year period, showed WHO rates to be on average 15 percent higher (*Shaw, Van Dijk, Rhomberg* 2003). The explanation for this higher count of the WHO might be that hospitals classify as homicides cases of assault resulting in death – whereby the perpetrator did not intend to apply lethal force. Further analysis revealed that the higher counts of WHO do not occur in developed countries. The discrepancies are limited to middle-income countries (WHO 19 % higher) and developing countries (WHO 45 % higher). The latter finding suggest that the main reason for the differences is that in developing countries even for as serious a crime as homicide a significant proportion of crimes committed is never reported to the police or never recorded (see also *Altbeker* 2005).

The United Nations surveys show a global average of 7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants per year in recent years. The WHO counted for the year 2000 over half a million homicide-related deaths or 8.8 per 100,000. Males account for 77 % of all homicides and have rates that are three times those of females (13.6 and 4 respectively). The highest rates are found among males aged 15–29 years (19.4 per 100,000).

For the purpose of this publication, the latest available national homicide rates were taken from the sixth, seventh and eighth UN surveys, covering the period 1990 to 2002 (most rates relate to 1998 to 2002). To increase coverage of countries, data was added from the WHO dataset for twelve countries not participating in any of the UN surveys. In the cases where these were rates of middle or lower income countries,

1 Internationale Probleme

statistical adjustments were made to achieve better comparability with the UN rates. Through this procedure homicide rates could be calculated for 111 countries.

Figure 2 shows regional rates for completed homicides.

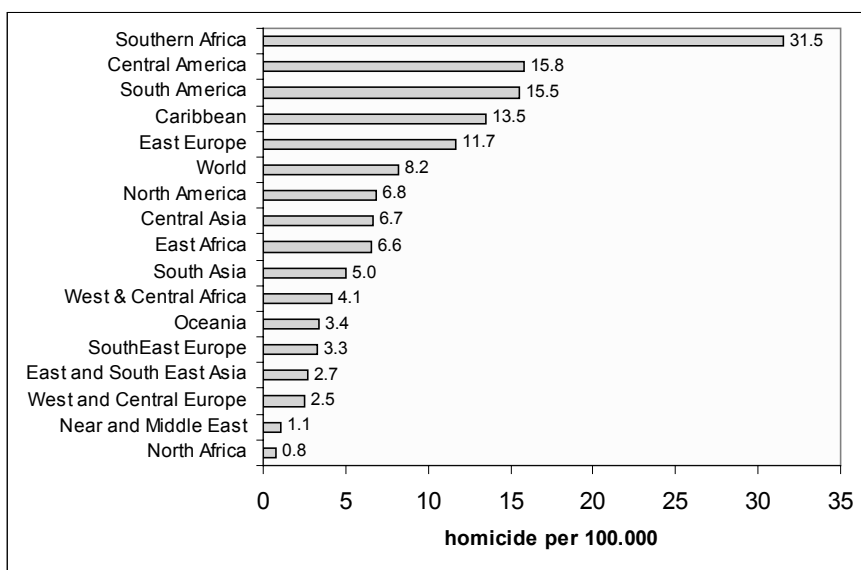


Figure 2: Homicides per 100,000 population in 2002 or latest year available, per world sub-region; sources : 6th, 7th and 8th UN Crime Surveys; WHO, 2002

Homicide rates are highest in Southern Africa, which in this respect is in a category of its own with rates above 30 per 100,000 population or three times the world average. Southern Africa is followed by Central America, South America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, while other regions show much lower rates.

The lowest levels reported were in North Africa, Middle-East/South-West Asia, West and Central Europe and East and South East Asia. Homicide rates in North Africa appear to be the lowest on earth with many countries maintaining rates below 1 per 100,000 inhabitants (see for details below). Apart from North Africa, such low rates can only be found in some parts of Western Europe.

The differences between different parts of the Western world are particularly noteworthy. North America, here represented by the USA and Canada, stands out with higher rates than both Western Europe and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand). In terms of homicides Canada is more similar to Western Europe than to its Southern neighbors. If Mexico were included in the rates for North America the regional rate would be even higher.

Eastern Europe contrasts starkly with Western Europe, with countries such as Russia (19,8) showing extremely high rates. High homicide rates in the former Soviet countries have also been observed in previous statistical overviews (*Aromaa, et al* 2003).

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

Previous analyses of data from Europe and North America have shown that the levels of various forms of violence are correlated, although not strongly (*Van Dijk* 1999). The high homicide rates observed in (subsaharan) Africa and the Americas are accompanied by high levels of robberies, assaults and sexual assaults.

Country rates for homicides are collected through the UN crime trends survey, supplemented by data from the WHO report on Health and Violence (WHO, 2002). Table 2 shows results.

Table 2: World ranking of countries according to rates of homicide per 100,000 population in 2002 or latest available year (110 countries); sources: UN Crime Surveys and WHO, 2002

Fifteen countries with highest homicide rates:

1 Swaziland	88.6	6 El Salvador	31.5	11 Bahamas	14.9
2 Colombia	62.7	7 Guatemala	25.5	12 Kazakhstan	14.5
3 South Africa	47.5	8 Puerto Rico	20.6	13 Mexico	13.0
4 Jamaica	33.7	9 Russian Fed.	19.8	14 Ecuador	13.0
5 Venezuela, RB	33.1	10 Brazil	19.5	15 Paraguay	12.0

countries with medium high homicide rates

16 Estonia	10.4	56 Turkey	3.3	80 Canada	1.7
26 Thailand	8.5	56 Switzerland	2.9	89 Italy	1.1
44 United States	5.6	59 Australia	2.8	90 Germany	1.1
46 Cuba	5.3	67 Sweden	2.5	92 Indonesia	1.0
53 India	3.7	73 United Kingdom	2.0	96 Netherlands	1.0

countries with low homicide rates

97 Bahrain	1.0	102 Austria	0.8	107 Israel	0.5
98 Jordan	1.0	103 Greece	0.8	108 Morocco	0.5
99 Saudi Arabia	0.9	104 Oman	0.6	109 Cyprus	0.3
100 Singapore	0.9	105 Hong Kong	0.6	110 Myanmar	0.2
101 Luxembourg	0.9	106 Japan	0.5	111	

Sources:

UN Survey on Crime Trends and the Operation of Criminal Justice Systems, 8th survey, 2002 data,

UN Survey on Crime Trends and the Operation of Criminal Justice Systems, 7th survey, 2000/1999 data,

UN Survey on Crime Trends and the Operation of Criminal Justice Systems, 6th survey, 1997 data,

WHO data from World Report on Violence and Health 2002.

3.3 Diagnosing organised crime with the use of markers

According to common definitions of organized crime in criminological literature (*Kenney, Finckenhauer* 1995; *Levi* 2002) defining traits of organized crime are the use of extreme violence, corruption of public officials, including law enforcement and judicial officers, penetration of the legitimate economy (eg through money-laundering) and interference in the political process. These elements are not only incorporat-

1 Internationale Probleme

ed in national anti-mafia laws in some countries, including the USA and Italy (*Fijnaut., Paoli 2004*) but also used as operational definitions by the European police community through the so-called Falcone checklist (*Levi 2002*).

If comparing official police-based information on garden variety crimes as burglary or street robbery seems no longer feasible, there is little hope for optimism regarding the comparison of police-based information on more complex crimes. At the global level it is to be expected that the number of police-recorded cases of organized crime correlates inversely with the seriousness of the problem. Where organized crime rules, few of such cases will ever be investigated, let alone brought before a court. Statistics on drug seizures can illustrate the point. Seizures of drugs by police or custom authorities of a country are likely to reflect law enforcement priorities and professional capacities rather than the global flow of drugs.

As shown in the previous chapters, the level of conventional crime can be successfully estimated through the administering of standardized victimization surveys among the public or samples of business executives. Through direct contacting of key groups of the public, bypassing the domestic legal institutions, at least some of the methodological problems can be avoided. There seems to be no a priori reasons why the same approach could not be followed to estimate the extent of organized crime in a country, for example by interviewing business executives, the key target group of racketeering and extortion, one of the most important manifestations of local organized crime in many countries.

Since 1997 the World Economic Forum has carried out surveys among CEO's of larger companies to identify obstacles to businesses in an increasing number of countries, reaching a total of 102 in 2003. From the onset, one of the questions in these 'executives opinion surveys' asked about the prevalence in the country of 'mafia-oriented racketeering, extortion (imposes or not serious costs on businesses)'.

An analysis was conducted of the patterns of answers given to this question on perceived mafia prevalence from the seven annual rounds of WEF surveys conducted since 1997. To further reduce sampling error, the scores of the surveys were averaged. The resulting mean scores are based on sample sizes of 500 and over for each country. They reflect the perceived prevalence of organized crime in the period 1997 to 2003 according to business executives.

In order to facilitate further statistical exploration, a composite index was constructed based on the averaged rankings of countries on the WEF surveys of 1997 to 2003 and the assessments of organized crime prevalence of an international risk assessment group (MIG), covering a total of 156 countries. For an explanation of the methodology of the index please see *Buscaglia and Van Dijk (2003)* and *Van Dijk (2006)*. This so-called Organized Crime Perception Index (OCPI) refers to the level of different types of organized crime activities such as extortion and drugs, arms and people trafficking as perceived by potential victim groups and experts. The widespread perception among key persons that such activities are rampant in a country provides by itself no proof that this is actually the case, but it provides ground for further enquiries. It can be regarded as a first "marker" of organised crime presence.

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

As mentioned above, instrumental violence corruption of public officials and money-laundering are regarded as universal secondary characteristics of organized crime. It is hard to imagine a high level of organized crime in a country without a significant amount of these three systemic mafia-related phenomena. Lethal violence, for example, is not by itself a unique characteristic of organized crime. Nor is the absence of such violence by itself evidence that organised crime is non-existent on the territory. However, a high prevalence of 'killings' in a country can be used a 'marker' of mafia-type criminal activity. Where homicide rates are high, organised crime activity is likely to be significant and vice versa.

Statistical indicators were selected for the prevalence of each of the three defining systemic characteristics or "markers" of organized crime activity in countries: instrumental violence, high-level corruption and money-laundering. As a fourth marker we included an indicator of the size of the black market. In an attempt to develop a proxy measure of 'mob-related violence', rates were calculated of the number of police-recorded homicides per country minus the number of convictions for homicide. Both types of data were drawn from the latest UN Crime and Criminal Justice Surveys. The resulting rates of 'unsolved homicides' was used as proxy indicator of 'mob-related homicide'. Similarly a proxy indicator of 'high level corruption' was derived from studies of the World Bank Institute (*Kaufmann, Kraay, Mastruzzi* 2003). Indicators of money-laundering and the extent of the black economy were taken from the World Economic Forum reports (WEF 2003; 2003).

The organized crime perception index was found to be fairly strongly or strongly correlated with the four other indicators of secondary manifestations of organized crime (with correlation coefficient of .50 or more). The high degree of correlation justified the construction of a composite organized crime index combining the five inter-related indicators. An important strategic advantage of the composite index is the incorporation of at least one **objective** measure of organized crime activity, the rate of unsolved homicides according to official administrations. Scores on this composite index cannot be dismissed by governments as being based on 'just perceptions'. The scores are corroborated by the official 'body counts' of their own police authorities as reported to the United Nations through the Crime Surveys.

Table 3 depicts the regional distribution on the Composite Organized Crime Index. For diagnostic purposes, the picture also presents both the exact scores on the composite index and on its five source indicators.

Country scores

The combination of data from different sources allows the calculation of scores for a large number of countries. To facilitate assessments of the organized crime situation of countries both the scores and the rank numbers for each of the indicators/markers are included. In most cases the rank numbers for different indicators are in the same range. Deviations of single indicators can point to specific features of organized crime or to deficiencies in some of the measures. In both cases further research is indicated. In some cases the diagnosis can only be very tentative due to lack of sufficient information.

1 Internationale Probleme

Table 3: Regional mean scores on composite index of organized crime, integrating data on perceived organized crime prevalence, grand corruption, money-laundering, extent of shadow economy and the rates of unsolved murders per 100,000 population

Region	Composite organized crime index	Organized crime perception Index	Informal sector	unsolved homicide	high level corruption	money laundering
Oceania	33.15	17.05	21.92	23.40	9.05	94.32
West and Central Europe	35.48	21.70	31.51	36.96	11.86	75.39
North America	44.02	36.71	42.47	47.87	21.83	71.21
East and South East Asia	44.80	50.09	38.36	54.84	10.24	70.45
Central America	50.45	50.07	71.23	45.74	30.03	55.18
Near and Middle East (South West Asia)	50.47	53.12	50.68	67.02	4.50	77.02
World	54.01	53.79	57.17	58.85	33.53	63.71
South Asia	54.18	62.79	64.38	58.51	29.67	55.56
North Africa	54.89	51.59	45.21	52.13		70.64
East Africa	55.44	56.97	65.75		39.68	59.34
Southern Africa	55.56	55.84	68.49	51.06	43.40	59.00
South America	58.19	56.32	71.23	60.37	47.74	55.30
SouthEast Europe	58.27	67.48	65.75	71.91	31.18	55.00
West & Central Africa	59.94	60.29	67.12	90.43	20.48	61.36
East Europe	69.54	89.24	80.82	83.69	50.39	43.56
Central Asia and Transcaucasian Countries	69.79	76.43		80.00	52.95	
Caribbean	69.94	54.90	72.60		100.00	52.27

Within Europe organized crime prevalence increases diagonally from the North West to the South East, with levels being low in England and Germany, higher in Spain and Italy and by far the highest in Russia, Albania and Ukraine.

The country rates should not be taken at face value but be used as a basis for further diagnostic enquiries. In Asia rates are the worst in parts of South Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh). But also the emerging superpowers, China and India, are rated above Italy on this composite index. In the international literature on organized crime India is rarely the focus of attention. Perhaps this is an oversight. Research on Chinese organized crime is mainly focussed on Chinese expatriates. Limited available research findings on homeland China point to collusion between corrupt communist party members and local gangs in remote areas (*Zhang* 2002). More research on the role of the organized crime-corruption in these two countries seems fully warranted because it may have serious negative implications for their development potential.

In Africa, Nigeria, Angola and Mozambique stand out with the highest scores. Nigerian organized crime activity in both the country and the region has been well-documented (*Shaw* 2002; UNODC 2005). A detailed account of how organized crime threatens to penetrate state and businesses in Southern Africa, notably in Mozambique, is given in *Gastrow* (2003). In Latin America Haiti, Paragua, Guatemala, Venezuela and Colombia show the highest scores. High scores are also observed in Jamaica.

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

Table 4: World ranking of countries according to scores on the Composite Organized Crime Index (156 countries)²
Twenty five countries with the highest scores

Country	Composite organized crime index	Organized Crime Perception		Informal Sector	rank	High level corruption	rank	Unsolved homicide	rank	money laundering	
		Index	Rank							Rank	Rank
1 Haiti	100.00	95.14	2	100.00	1					86.37	10
2 Paraguay	95.74	76.05	20	95.89	2					97.47	4
3 Albania	93.90	96.15	1			68.09	19	100.00	2		
4 Nigeria	91.93	85.80	7	83.56	7	90.43	4			85.13	11
5 Guatemala	91.57	75.48	21	82.19	10					100.00	1
6 Venezuela	89.57	88.32	6	83.56	8	76.60	12			87.60	7
7 Russian Fed.	88.20	81.40	14	76.71	17	95.74	3	75.88	4	83.90	16
8 Angola	87.90	70.56	25	90.41	4					86.37	9
9 Ukraine	87.40	83.99	9	84.93	6	98.94	2	42.09	16	99.94	2
10 Colombia	86.81	93.70	3	61.64	41	61.70	26	100.00	1	90.07	5
11 Mozambique	86.54	59.90	42	84.93	5					98.71	3
12 Bangladesh	84.69	83.18	11	71.23	24					83.90	15
13 Kazakhstan	83.78	55.99	49			82.98	7	96.80	3		
14 Pakistan	83.71	85.14	8	83.56	9	86.17	6			59.22	52
15 Jamaica	83.42	80.31	17	76.71	16					77.73	22

2 In the calculation of the composite OC index only the figures which are based on at least 2 values are showed. According to the GAD survey however, perception of crime is very high in Iraq, Congo, West Bank and Gaza (all in top 5)

1 Internationale Probleme

Twenty five countries with moderately high scores

Country	Composite organized crime		Organized Crime Perception		Informal Sector	rank	High level corruption		Unsolved homicide	rank	money laundering	
	index		Index	Rank			corruption	rank			rank	Rank
18 Bolivia	79.79		61.31	41	93.15	3	65.96	20			78.97	19
22 Mexico	75.03		68.62	26	68.49	31	69.15	17			75.26	23
25 Indonesia	74.51		81.41	13	46.58	60	86.17	5			65.39	42
28 Peru	72.64		67.05	32	82.19	11	55.32	33	64.57	5	71.56	28
30 Turkey	72.08		53.62	55	78.08	15	65.96	22			72.80	26
33 Brazil	69.24		68.44	27	63.01	37	61.70	25			66.63	41
38 South Africa	66.07		80.67	16	61.64	39	51.06	38	59.74	8	56.76	54
48 Argentina	59.39		64.40	34	72.60	21	56.38	30	1.26	59	83.90	14
56 Egypt	56.17		51.74	58	57.53	46	52.13	36			49.35	59
59 China	55.48		64.25	35	52.05	54	77.66	10	7.04	46	59.22	51
64 India	53.79		52.86	56	63.01	38	58.51	29	12.50	33	65.39	43
81 Italy	46.81		52.74	57	47.95	59	54.26	35	4.15	52	60.46	49
81 United States	36.36		24.54	85	27.40	85	42.55	45	42.71	15	33.31	84
86 Japan	32.67		36.60	70	23.29	94	61.70	27	2.01	56	29.61	90
90 Chile	30.59		21.29	90	32.88	74	26.60	57	29.40	21	33.31	85
97 Canada	25.06		19.74	93	32.88	73	31.91	51	0.94	62	32.08	88

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

Twenty five countries with the lowest scores

Country	Composite organized crime		Organized Crime Perception		Informal Sector	rank	High level corruption		Unsolved homicide	rank	money laundering		Rank
	index	index	Index	Rank			rank	rank			rank	rank	
99 UK	23.90		17.40	99	28.77	84	21.28	62			22.21		94
100 Norway	22.08		11.74	104	26.03	90	26.60	58	3.39	53	35.78		82
101 Luxembourg	21.11		7.19	107	16.44	102					35.78		81
102 Germany	20.21		16.09	101	26.03	89	27.66	56	1.57	57	23.44		92
103 Switzerland	19.98		8.28	105	21.92	97	14.89	65	2.95	54	45.65		66
104 Jordan	19.38		18.10	97	31.51	77			4.59	51	18.51		96
105 Netherlands	18.91		19.22	95	24.66	92	11.70	66	9.67	41	23.44		93
106 Denmark	18.41		2.92	112	27.40	86	14.89	64	9.05	42	32.08		89
107 Sweden	18.30		4.06	111	31.51	80	26.60	60	8.86	44	14.81		98
108 Australia	16.79		7.95	106	17.81	101	29.79	54	10.87	37	12.34		99
109 Bahrain	15.28		22.58	89					6.09	49			
110 Singapore	14.10		6.15	110	19.18	99	24.47	61	1.51	58	14.81		97
111 New Zealand	12.83		6.19	109	24.66	93	17.02	63	6.16	48	6.17		100
112 Iceland	12.46		1.46	114	21.92	95							102
113 Finland	10.41		1.79	113	20.55	98	10.64	67	12.12	34	3.70		101

1 Internationale Probleme

The world map of organized crime emerging from this index differs fundamentally from that of conventional crimes. The perceived prevalence of organized crime and the overall ICVS rates of victimization by volume crime was found to be unrelated ($r = 0.15$, n.s.). The level of volume crime in a country says very little about the level of organized crime. This result suggests that levels of volume crime and of organized crime are determined by different factors at the macro level (*Van Dijk, Nevala 2002; van Dijk 2007*).

4 Prospects of criminological research at the UN

The working paper on Trends in Crime and Justice presented by UNODC/UNICRI at the 2005 UN Congress which contained many of the the statistics highlighted above, was well received by participants. In the Final Declaration of the Congress a paragraph underlined the need of collecting and sharing information on crime and terrorism and welcomed “the important work done by UNODC and the Programme Network of Institutes in the area of trends in crime and justice”.

At the Fourteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2005, the Executive Director of The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stressed in his opening speech the need for quantitative research as a foundation for policy-making on crime. He recalled that the international community has considerable respect for the annual World Economic Report, World Development Report, World Trade Report, and World Drug Report and similar publications. Against this background he asked whether the Crime Commission was now ready to deliberate policy on the basis of a World Crime Report. In spite of the favorable reception of the working paper distributed at the Bangkok Congress, the Commission’s answer to this invitation was negative. The delegate of the United States expressed reservations about the production of such reports. Crime, in the view of his delegation, was a more “subtle” issue than drugs. Drugs trafficking involved only a handful of countries while each country coped with its own crime problems. Without much debate the Commission adopted a resolution requesting the Secretariat to hold expert consultations on the feasibility and desirability of such a report rather than on the development of the report itself.

On 24–28 April 2006 an Expert Group Meeting was convened in Vienna to to consider ways and means too improve crime data collection, research and analysis. The group formulated a list of recommendations for the Crime Commission. Regarding the UN Crime Survey the recommendation was made to once more revise and re-focus its questionnaire. It was further advised to develop a core version to be executed annually, supplemented by ad hoc modules on specific topics at longer intervals. The group further emphasized the importance of victim surveys to complement administrative statistics. Concerning organized crime and corruption qualitative and quantitative measures should be developed, possibly ‘through’ the identification of relevant indicators and “markers”, i.d. direct or indirect measures of the phenomena. Other recommendations dealt with the need to consult with the Conference of State Parties of UNTOC and to raise sufficient funds for further work (E/CN.15/2006/4).

1.6 Criminological Research in the Framework of the United Nations

What are the prospects of the Crime Commission endorsing the recommendations of the Expert Group and of their fruitful implementation by UNODC/UNICRI thereafter? In 2006 and 2007 work on the crime survey and a world crime report seems to have stagnated. UNODC has published two regional crime reports, using fragmented statistical information available in the public domain. Results of the 2005 sweep of the crime survey have not yet been used in UN-based publications.

In an assessment of the future prospects of such work the following considerations must be borne in mind. Although the production of comparative crime statistics is admittedly difficult and will never be easy, dedicated criminologists can probably overcome the methodological reservations that many have concerning the feasibility of international crime statistics. Yet there are other external forces restricting the international criminal justice community from regularly producing uniform crime statistics. In my view, the single most important impediment is simply that governments do not want to be confronted with benchmarks in this politically sensitive domain. Ever since the 19 century French geographer *Guerry* dubbed crime statistics 'moral statistics' such statistics are seen by governments as their nation's 'dirty laundry', not be flaunted in the public arena. Many governments have a vested interest in **not** disseminating reliable international crime information.³ A World Crime report will therefore always remain controversial.

For the United Nations to be in a position to produce a high quality World Crime Report, two conditions must in my view be met. As the Expert Group wisely concluded in its report to the Crime Commission, adequate resources should be made available to allow the effective implementation of plans for a World Crime Report. From the outset the single main impediment of an effective UN crime programme has been the chronic lack of resources to carry out mandates approved by the govern-

3 The opposition to a World Crime Report which surfaced at the UN Crime Commission in 2005 is far from unprecedented. Ever since the UN launched its Survey on Crime and the Operation of Criminal Justice in 1977, Member States have been suspicious of the objectives of the survey and reluctant to share their crime and justice related statistics. In 1983 *Freda Adler*, one of the protagonists of the UN Surveys, published her pioneering comparative book, *Nations not Obsessed with Crime*, describing and comparing the crime situation of seven low crime countries such as Switzerland (*Adler* 1983). It is worth noting here that her original work included a description of seven high crime countries as well. This darker flip-side of the study had to be dropped because of political opposition of the countries involved. Another, more recent example of repressed knowledge on crime in a comparative perspective is a UNDP sponsored book on the illegal drugs industry in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. In order not to embarrass the current administrations of these countries with references to historical illegal drugs industries and drugs-related corruption, the UNDP Office stopped the publication of the planned publication (*Thoumi* 2002). At the Tenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2000 in Vienna a backroom paper was distributed by the Centre of International Crime Prevention with an overview of international statistics on crime and corruption based on survey research, among the public. The paper had to be withdrawn at the urgent request of representatives of a Latin American country featuring at the top for some of the rankings. Many more examples of political interference in the production of such statistics can be given (*Van Dijk* 2007).

1 Internationale Probleme

ing bodies. The launch of a new crime programme in 1991 and the more recent merger with the drugs programme have not eliminated this key impediment. In the current situation resources available for the production and analysis of crime statistics at UNODC are still minimal. More professional staff is available at UNICRI but its donors have so far shown little interest in funding comparative research. If Member States are interested in fact-based discussions on global crime issues, a reasonable budget for the collection of international crime and justice statistics should somehow be secured. Since such funds are unlikely to be allotted from the regular budget of the UN, they should be made available through voluntary contributions to the Crime Fund by a group of donor countries and/or private donors.

A second consideration concerns the political sensitivity of any comparative data on crime and justice. As recommended by the 2006 Expert Group, administrative statistics collected through the regular UN Crime Surveys must be supplemented by data collected through surveys among the public and the business sector. Such external data are bound to be met with opposition from countries that are portrayed in a less favourable light. This is especially likely to happen with data on corruption and organized crime. Most international statistics collected by the UN are based on official data submitted by the Member States themselves. This is typically the case with economic and health statistics and also with statistics on drugs seizures. It is unusual for UN agencies other than so-called Special Rapporteurs, to publish data that have been collected independently from the member states. The inevitable use of non-official data in a World Crime Report makes the preparation of such report a politically sensitive undertaking.

To prevent undue political interference with the production and analysis of such data, institutional arrangements must be put in place that can assure the independence of the work. In our view the Executive Board of UNICRI, consisting of individual experts elected by ECOSOC, is ideally placed to take upon itself the role of steering committee of a future World Crime Report. The UNICRI Board seems the torch-bearer of the venerable UN tradition of unpoliticized reflection on crime and justice issues dating from the 1950 and 1960ties. For the production of credible international statistics on crime and justice the existence of an institutional shield against undue interference seems indispensable. The ideal scenario would be that both the Crime Commission and the Conference of State Parties of UNTOC and the UN-CAC request UNICRI to initiate work on the development of comparable indicators of crime, including organized crime/corruption and its counter measures. At the same time, efforts should be made to raise funds of 0,5 million euro or more for five years as a minimum. The implementation of such global crime indicators programme should partly be outsourced to institutes of the programme Network of Institutes such as ILANUD and UNAFRI. If, and only if, such scenario would unfold, the prospects for the UN collecting a new generation of international crime statistics look favorable.

5 In conclusion

Those convinced of the utility of collecting and analyzing comparative crime statistics for political and academic reasons, find themselves in a quandary. Because of the intrinsic opposition of many governments, the production of international crime statistics is chronically underfunded. As a result, the case for such statistics must be made on the basis of fragmentary, dated and in some respects flawed statistics. Anyone publishing such data can count on close scrutiny of their methodological soundness and, if any flaws are detected, on stridently critical reviews. In this situation, many experts are inclined to stay on the scientifically safe side: the few available international crime statistics are presented to illustrate their methodological weakness rather than their potential to inform policy making and advance grounded theories of crime.

From a scientific perspective such a cautious approach might be commendable. But as *Aebi, Killias, and Tavares* (2003) rightly point out, it plays in the hands of those who prefer such information not to be, or ever become, available for self serving, political reasons. It means capitulating to political forces that would prefer comparative criminology to remain 'statistically challenged' for ever. In our opinion, the time has come to break the politically imposed *omerta* of criminologists on comparative crime and justice. The new generation of criminologists are well-travelled and intellectually more internationally oriented than in the past. They will hopefully revolt against the conspicuous absence of a steady flow of credible statistics in their chosen field of study. The collection and dissemination of such statistics seems a worthy goal for the United Nations to pursue.

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1 Internationale Probleme

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